

Sustainability Library project: BA Spatial Design students and library staff

London College of Communication Library, University of the Arts London

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In January 2014 the first-year students on the BA spatial design course at London College of Communication (LCC) were set a brief to redesign an area of the college library for the 2014–15 academic year. The project was to be a collaboration involving the library team, the academic staff of the spatial design course and the students. The result is a space that highlights the theme of sustainability, and is colourful, comfortable and welcoming.

The specifics of the design brief were to redesign an area of the library's group-working area in its Learning Zone into a Sustainability Library, which would demonstrate eco-awareness and include a 'mobile library' unit (referred to as the MoLib) within it. The intention of the Sustainability Library was to engage students with ideas about sustainability through use of the library's resources, while the MoLib would be used to support a series of talks in various parts of the college focusing on sustainability.

Planning the project

The project was proposed to the BA Spatial Design team by Barbara Salvadori (LCC workshop technician). It was supported by the LCC library team (in the early stages by Matt Hunt, Leila Kassir and Ruth Collingwood, and later by Tania Olsson, Richenda Gwilt and me as the librarian for the spatial design course). Learning Zone team members Derek Churchill and Paul Rogers were also involved in the project.

In order to design the space with a sustainability theme, the students had to research how other students used resources in the library and how space was used for interaction. In early February Valerie Mace and Silvia Grimaldi (the BA spatial design course leaders) invited me to view some of the designs as the students presented them to their cohort in their studio, in order for the library to express a view and have an active input into the project. It was a real pleasure to be involved at this level, and it gave me an insight into how the students form their designs using sketches, plans and models, and how the project occurred at a creative and practical stage in the development of their practice.

The spatial design students subsequently tested their ideas by presenting them to a peer group of students during Green Week, a week in February when the University of the Arts London (UAL) highlights and promotes environmental and sustainability-themed events.

The spatial design academic staff and the members of the library team judged the students' design proposals in the summer term and the winners were announced. The library was looking for a design that would take into consideration the multi-use nature of the space, which is used both as a pop-up space for sessions and talks and as a group-working area for the students. We were also keen to acquire a design that would not require too much management by the library team.

Work in progress – designing the space and building the MoLib

This phase involved the reconfiguration of the space and the construction of the unit, which took place between June and September 2014. The winning students, Joy Williams and Ashleigh Nutton, worked closely with Silvia and Valerie, Barbara and Gregor Garber (LCC workshop technician) to prepare the project for construction through detailed design, adjustments and costings, while also working to specified deadlines and budgets. Joy and Ashleigh then worked with Barbara, Gregor and Rob Bell (visiting spatial design tutor) to construct the area and the unit, while the library team was briefed at regular meetings throughout the summer.

Active involvement of the library team, and our views on all stages of the design – such as the colours for the walls, the use of environmentally-friendly

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paint, the recycled material and flame-resistant seating, and health and safety aspects – were considered at regular meetings.



Work in progress
Photos: Leo Clarey



MoLib in situ

Ambitions for the use of the Sustainability Library space and the Mobile Unit

The Sustainability Library and MoLib were formally launched on 13 October 2014 at a reception attended by students and staff. Introductions were made by Silvia, Valerie (BA Spatial design course leaders) and by Joy and Barbara, who explained their thinking behind the project, and expressed satisfaction that the project had achieved their aim. Joy explained that the letters S – E – E – D on the chalkboard stand for 'sustainable', 'environmental', 'ecological' and 'durable', and serve to attract students to write their ideas and thoughts about sustainability for viewing on the board. A further presentation, to which I contributed on behalf of the library, was made to UAL academic and support staff during the university's Learning and Teaching Week in January 2015.

Future plans to use the Sustainability Library space for lectures and talks by sustainability experts are still to be finalised. In addition to internal talks, it is proposed to bring in experts from a rich and diverse cross-section of practitioners in the fields of design, education, print and production, including forecasters and activists. These talks will be for all UAL students and staff who have an interest in sustainability. The MoLib will be used as part of the lecture series as a physical representation of the Sustainability Library. Each expert will select references, resources and books to be housed in the mobile library unit. These books will be stored in the MoLib for the duration of the project. As well as enhancing a community of practice, it is hoped that the sustainability-themed talks will result in the library's collection being given a higher profile, while also encouraging a culture of sharing between staff and students in an informal and relaxed way.



Sustainability Library with furnishings; the white wall is for projections, as this is also a pop-up space.



Expansive view of Sustainability Library, including 'SEED' chalkboard
Photos: Paul Rogers

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The Sustainability Library space has demonstrated that students and staff can work collaboratively and with positive results in order to produce an attractive, robust and engaging space, which allows students to use the space in a relaxed and social way.

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